NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

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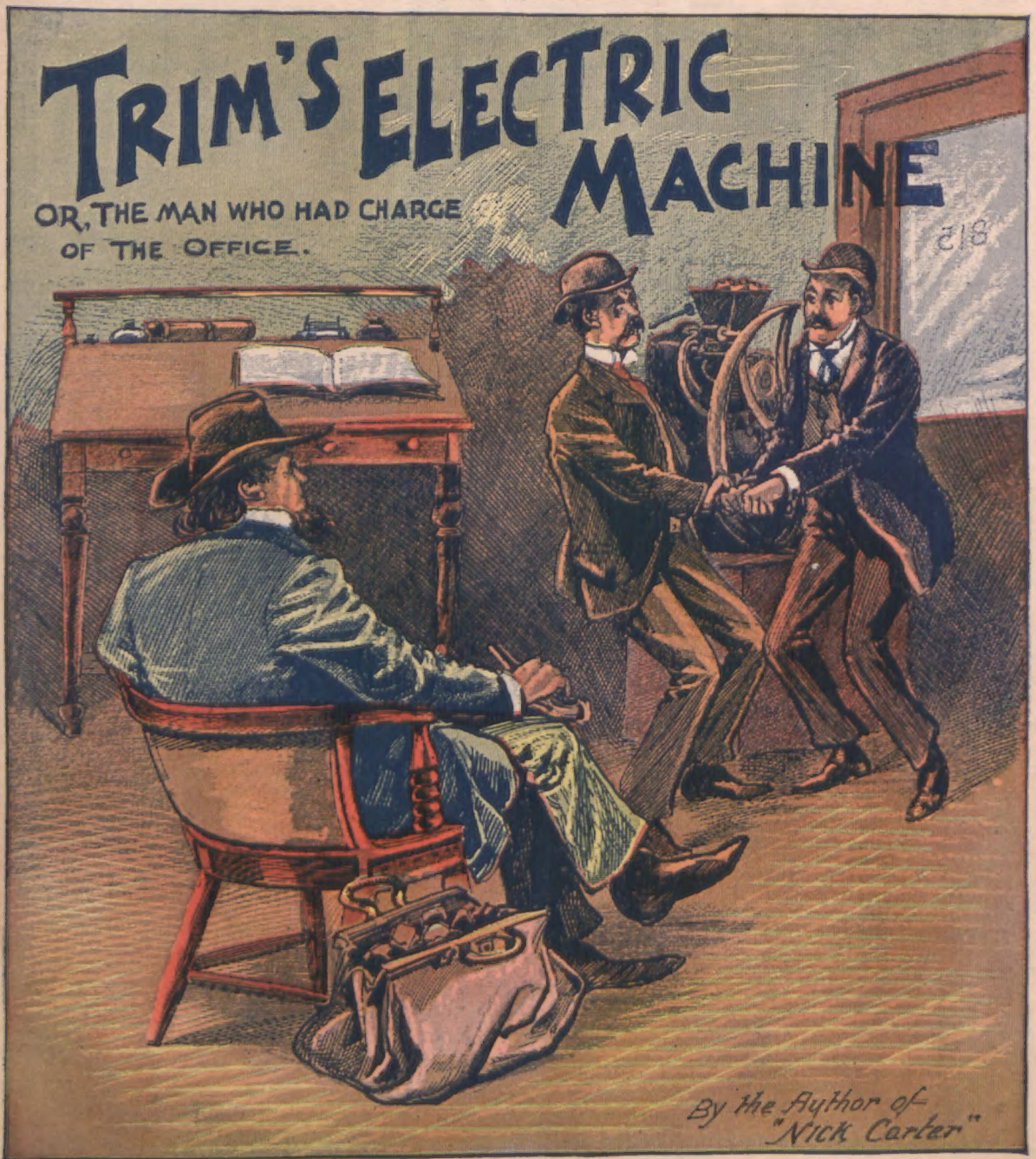
TRIM'S ELECTRIC MACHINE

OR, THE MAN WHO HAD CHARGE OF THE OFFICE.



"NOW, GENTLEMEN, YOU CAN DANCE THERE JUST AS LONG AS YOU WANT TO. IT DEPENDS ENTIRELY ON YOU."

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TRIM'S ELECTRIC MACHINE;

OR,

The Man Who Had Charge of the Office.

By the Author of "NICK CARTER."

CHAPTER I.

FARMER HATGOOD'S BAG.

One day in June a man stepped from a train in the Grand Central Depot, New York, whose appearance immediately attracted the attention of all who were in the depot at that time awaiting the arrival of the train.

He was tall and lean and his store clothes fitted him about as well as a meal bag if it were hung over a bean pole.

There was a bunch of white whiskers on his chin and an old-fashioned traveling bag in one hand, while in the other he carried a green cotton umbrella.

His hat was of straw and the stains on its brim showed that it had seen a good many years of wear.

"There's a hayseed from way-back and no mistake," remarked one baggage man to another as the old man came slowly down the long platform toward the depot entrance.

"Somebody ought to lock him up before he gets into trouble," remarked the other bagagge man with a grin.

"He looks as if he would be fine game for the bunco steerers," said the first. "I'd like to bet that he's got a wad of bills in that old gripsack of his that he expects to exchange for green goods before the day is over!"

"Yes," laughed the second, "if we're on duty at nightfall we may see him starting for home with a box of sawdust in his bag."

The old hayseed continued down the platform with his lips pressed close together and his eyes straight ahead as if he had determined that he would appear like other people and not show any curious interest in the scene.

Before he came to the end, however, the cries of the carriage agents, the noise of the street beyond and the moving of baggage trucks across his path confused him a little.

He halted for a moment, looked around in a kind of half-scared way and then started on as determined as before.

Any one with a fair knowledge of human nature would have known at a glance that he was on his first visit to New York, and that in spite of his determination, the very first noises of the city had alarmed him.

As a matter of fact, few men are experienced enough to enter a great city for the first time without a little feeling of

confusion, and, of course, it is very much more so in the case of a man who has been used all his life to the quiet roads of a farming town.

This man pushed his way through the crowd of people who had come to meet friends on the train and went straight out to the street.

He was there greeted by a chorus of cries from hackmen.

"Have a cab, uncle?"

"Here you are, squire, take a wagon!"

"This way to Brooklyn Bridge and the Washington Arch!"

"All aboard for the Bowery!"

These and a lot of other remarks were addressed to him in a joking way, for none of the cabmen had the least idea that the old hayseed would spend any money in carriage hire.

He looked at them with a little alarm as he saw that they were addressing their remarks to him, and then shut his teeth harder together than before, marched across the street until he came to the sidewalk in front of the Grand Union Hotel.

There he drew a long breath and looked around him.

"By gum!" he muttered, "but this is a more skittish place than I thought 'twould be.

"Now I'd like tew know where are them stairs that my nephew tole me 'bout!"

He looked up at the elevated railroad over his head.

Just then a train came in from the direction of Third Avenue.

The old man dodged into one of the doorways of the hotel evidently in fear that the train would come down upon him.

A couple of bootblacks who were at work near laughed as they saw this act and understood what it meant.

"Say!" said the farmer, addressing them after he had recovered from his fright when he saw that the train above him stood still, "he laughs best who laughs last!"

Then he shut his mouth again and moved a little way down the street toward Third Avenue.

"I mustn't forgit," he muttered, "how 'tain't the thing in this here town tew speak tew anybody, but I'd like tew know how in tarnation anybody gits up tew that there railroad in the air!

"My nephew said there was stairs right at the depot tew climb up tew it, an' that I was tew go up them stairs an' ask the ticket seller for a downtown train.

"Ef I hadn't got my bag an' my umbrella with me I suppose I could shin up one of them iron posts, but I don't believe that's the way to go up."

The old man's confusion was perfectly natural, for at this station on the elevated railroad the stairway is inside the Grand Central depot, and unless one is familiar with the place he is quite likely to miss it.

"I don't dares tew ask anybody any questions," continued the old man to himself; "guess I'd better walk 'long underneath this bridge an' ef I foller it far 'nough I'm likely tew git down town.

"My nephew tole me 'twas 'bout three miles tew Wall Street, an' three miles' walk ain't nothin' tew me; save five cents, anyway."

With this thought, he clutched his grip and umbrella harder and started on.

In spite of his determination to appear like other people, he could not help staring around him at the strange sights.

Everybody seemed to be in a hurry in this city and, therefore, the fact that one man was walking very rapidly in the same direction that he was, but on the other side of the street, did not attract his attention.

He did not see this man cross Forty-second Street at Lexington Avenue, turn around and come toward him.

He was surprised, therefore, when a moment later an entire stranger held out his hand, and with a voice that seemed filled with pleasant surprise, exclaimed:

"Why, deacon, how do you do? You're the last man I expected to see here! I'm delighted that I've run across you so soon."

The hayseed did not give this pleasant-speaking man his hand.

He drew himself up, held his grip behind him and responded:

"Look ahere, mister, I'd have ye onderstand that I ain't no deacon an' that I ain't no game for a bunco swindler, dew you hear?"

"Bunco!" exclaimed the other as if deeply offended. "Swindler! Why, Mr. ——"

"Yeou can't call my name, not ef yeou try for a month of Sundays!" interrupted the hayseed.

"I'm just on tew yeou, I'd have yeou onderstand, an' I ain't 'fraid of the whole tribe of ye."

"I presume I'm mistaken," the other muttered, "but you reminded me so much of a good old friend of mine, Deacon Johnson, of Little Falls."

"Well," said the hayseed, "I ain't from Little Falls I ain't a deacon, an' my name ain't Johnson, but I'd just as leave tell yeou my right name, 'cause I read the newspapers, I dew, an' they've learned me all 'bout slick strangers who come up tew countrymen in the city an' rope 'em into some kind of green goods swindle.

"I ain't that kind I tell yeou though I've had letters from yeou many a time."

The other smiled queerly and was about to back away as if he gave up the case as a bad job when the hayseed continued:

"My name's Hatgood," he said, "Josiah Hatgood, if yeou want the whole of it, an' my post-office address is Berlin, Vermont.

"Now, then, yeou can git out ef yeou want tew; I ain't 'fraid of bein' known, an' I ain't goin' to git taken in by no sharpers in this here city if I am a farmer."

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Hatgood," returned the other gravely, "I've made a mistake and I'm sorry for it. Good-morning, Mr. Hatgood."

"Good-day tew ye!"

Farmer Hatgood started on again while the man who had spoken to him waved his hand and shook his head as he looked across the street to another man who stood at the curb there watching the scene.

It was a sign that the green countryman was not a promising victim and that there was no use in wasting time with him.

Accordingly the man on the curb started back toward the Grand Central depot, his partner going in the same direction but on the opposite side of the street.

At Lexington Avenue Farmer Hatgood halted to let two or three cable cars go by.

They gave him a good deal more alarm than the bunco steerer had, and his fingers twitched nervously as he started at last to cross the avenue.

Just then an Italian who had been standing there and looking about doubtfully, touched him on the sleeve and holding up an envelope began:

"No speaka English vera good——"

He did not get any further than this, for Hatgood raised the hand that held his bag high in the air and brought it down full force upon the Italian's head.

"There, gosh darn ye," cried the farmer as the Italian staggered and fell, "I'll teach yeou that I mean business with bunco steerers!

"Yeou're the partner of that feller who spoke tew me a minute ago.

"I know yeou! I ain't read the newspapers for nothin', I ain't!"

The Italian made an effort to rise, but did not succeed in doing so, and after a short struggle he lay full length upon the ground breathing heavily.

A crowd collected at once and the farmer, even if he had been cool enough to go on his way, would not have been able to do so at once because so many people hedged him in.

A policeman ran over from the opposite corner to see what was the matter.

"Data man strike-a me," groaned the Italian, as the policeman stood over him.

Several persons in the crowd had seen the blow and they told the officer excitedly what had happened.

"What are you trying to do, anyway!" demanded the policeman standing up and facing the farmer.

"He's a bunco," exclaimed Hatgood, "an' I knocked him down as he deserved tew be!"

"The old jay hit him without cause, Mr. Officer!" said one of the bystanders.

"Did he try to pick your pockets?" asked the polceman.

"No picka pocket!" cried the Italian, sitting up, "me honest man, me no know the way, me ask him. See?" and he held his envelope up.

The policeman looked at it and saw that it was addressed to somebody on East Forty-fifth street.

"No speeka English vera good," went on the Italian. "No reada anyting, me want to know way; that all!"

"Don't believe a darn word of it!" cried Hatgood. "He's probably partners with the feller that called me deacon back here a piece."

The crowd began to laugh, and the policeman was half inclined to take the matter as a good joke, but he could not do so because he saw that the Italian was really hurt.

When he tried to get up he sank back again with a groan and placed his hands upon his head.

"Vera bad! vera bad!" groaned the Italian.

Meantime the crowd was getting greater and blocking the way.

"We'll have to settle this at the station," said the policeman, shortly.

"Here you!"

With this, he waved his hand at a passing express wgon; the driver stopped immediately.

"You're under arrest, understand," added the policeman to Hatgood.

"What, me! Yeou're goin' tew take me up?"

"I am."

"Goin' tew put me in the lockup?"

"I'm going to make you tell your story to the sergeant."

"Thunderation!"

The farmer was too astonished to say anything more.

He looked wildly around as if he would like to make a break for liberty, but he must have seen that he could not force his way through the crowd, and so he remained quiet.

The policeman and one or two bystanders lifted the injured Italian into the express wagon.

"Take him to the sub-station in the Grand Central Station," said the policeman.

The driver nodded and drove away, while the policeman took Farmer Hatgood by the arm and marched after.

On the way an ambulance was summoned, and by the time the farmer came to the station a surgeon was on hand examining the Italian.

"He isn't seriously hurt," the surgeon said, after a few minutes, "he'll be able to get about after a half hour's rest, but he had a very severe blow and a dangerous one.

"If it had struck an inch harder it might have killed him."

"Dew tell!" exclaimed the farmer.

The policeman had explained the matter as he understcood it, to the sergeant, who saw that there had been a misunderstanding, but as he had to make a record of the matter he asked Hatgood for his name, address, business, etc.

Hatgood told him fully and explained how he had come to hit the Italian because of his suspicion that the fellow was acting as partner to the bunco steerer who had addressed him.

"You'll have to be very careful here," remarked the sergeant. "It won't do to be too free with your fists in this town."

"I didn't hit him with my fists!" retorted Hatgood.

"What did you hit him with then?"

"My bag."

"What have you got in it?"

"That's tellin'."

Hatgood picked up his bag and started from the station.

"Hold on, there!" cried the sergeant, who suspected that the farmer had come to town on some green goods business.

"Open that bag!"

"I don't believe yeou've got no right tew make me dew that!"

"Yes, I have; let's see what you've got there."

The farmer mumbled, but at last opened the bag and the astonished sergeant saw about a peck of stones.

They looked as if they had been broken from a ledge with a hammer.

"What the mischief are you going to do with them?" asked the sergeant.

"That's tellin'!" repeated the farmer as he closed the bag. "Now kin I go 'long?"

CHAPTER II.

THE FARMER BUYS A MACHINE AND TRIM GETS A CASE.

The sergeant allowed the farmer to go, and after asking some further questions of him, and learning that he wanted to get to Wall Street, ordered a policeman to show him the way to the elevated train.

The Italian, meantime, had recovered sufficiently to go his own way, so about half an hour later Mr. Hatgood descended the elevated railway stairway in Hanover Square, and after having lost himself in the crooked streets there three or four times, at last brought up before a building on the west side of Broad Street.

He looked it over, saw that the number on the door was the one that he was in search of and at last entered the hallway.

Many people were passing in and out. One man in uniform stood with his back to the wall not far from the door.

Hatgood addressed him.

"Say! mister, kin yeou tell me if Drummond & Cmpany are here somewhere?"

"Room 809. Take the elevator," was the response.

"Gosh!" exclaimed the farmer, "809! There's enough rooms in this one buildin' tew stock a whole village up in Vermont."

He looked doubtfully at one of the elevators which was just about to start, but did not enter.

The man in charge shut the door, pulled the lever and the elevator with its passengers shot up into the air.

"Jewhillikins!" said Hatgood, with a long whistle.

"Next car is all ready, sir," said the janitor, taking him by the arm and leading him to another elevator.

Hatgood got in, but it was perfectly certain that he did not enjoy the idea of the upward journey.

"Say!" he said to the boy in charge, "don't let the thing go tew darn fast."

The boy grinned but made no reply.

A moment later the car was filled, the door closed and up she went.

"Thunder and guns!" gasped the farmer all of a tremble, "stop her! stop her!"

"Third floor, please," said one of the passengers, smiling at the old man's fright.

The elevator stopped at the third floor and the farmer cried:

"Hold on, there! Let me out of this pesky thing!"

"Drummond and Company are not on this floor," said the boy in charge.

"I don't keer a darn where they be; walkin' 's good 'nough for me!" was the reply, and the farmer pushed his way out.

"Don't catch me in one of them darn things again as long as I live!" he muttered, as he started up the stairs.

It took him a good half hour more to get to the eighth floor for he wandered about every floor looking for room 809.

At last he stood before a door on which were the words:

"Drummond & Company,
American Gold Separator.
Patented."

"This must be the place at last," thought Hatgood as he opened the door and went in.

An office boy who had a desk near the door arose to meet him while at the same moment an elderly man came from the inner room.

"I want tew see Mr. Drumomnd," said Hatgood.

The boy looked doubtfully at the elderly man who asked quickly:

"What is your business, sir?"

"I've got some samples," began Hatgood when the elderly man interrupted.

"Tell Mr. Howard to step this way."

The boy disappeared and then turning to the farmer the elderly man continued:

"Mr. Howard will explain to you just what the gold separator is and does. He will speak for the firm in the matter."

"Thank ee, thank ee!" returned Hatgood.

A moment later a young man came from the inner room who introduced himself as Mr. Howard and asked Hatgood to sit down.

"I don't mind ef I dew set down," Hatgood responded, "for there's more stairs in this buildin' than I ever seen before in all my life."

Howard did not smile at the farmer's remarks, but listened patiently while Hatgood told him about samples of rock that he had in his bag that had been taken from his farm in Vermont.

"I believe there's gold there," Hatgood concluded, "an' I jedge from yeour letters that yeou've got a way of gittin' the gold out of the rock in such quantities that 'twould pay.

"I've brought these samples down here as yeou tole me tew, tew have them tested."

"Of course," said Howard, quietly, "it all depends upon the rock as well as upon our machine.

"Come inside and let me show you the article."

He took the farmer to the inner room, where there was a model of a new gold separator set up.

Nobody else was in the room, and the machine occupied about half the space.

"Looks like a big coffee mill, don't it?" said Hatgood.

"Yes, and it works much the same way. Now, Mr. Hatgood, you must be hungry by this time, aren't you?"

"I be. It's an hour an' a half past my dinner time."

"Then before I show you how the machine works and try your samples on it let's go out to lunch."

"I've got a sandwich in my pocket ——"

"No matter, you come and lunch with me; I'll pay the bill, you understand."

"Thank ee! thank ee!"

The farmer started toward the door through which he had come in.

"Let's go this way, it's nearer!" said Howard, turning to another door.

They passed through another room in which there were two or three desks unoccupied at the moment and so to the hall.

The farmer hesitated about going down in the elevator, but as Howard assured him that it was perfectly safe, he finally consented.

"It makes me feel sick tew the stomach!" he gasped, as they stepped out on the ground floor.

Howard never smiled.

"You'll get used to it soon," he said, and led the farmer to a restaurant near by.

Those who sat near them had many a smile at the farmer's expense during the lunchon, but Howard was always respectful and polite.

When they had finished, Howard paid the bill and conducted Hatgood from the restaurant to New Street.

They had entered at the Broad Street end of the place and Hatgood immediately saw the difference.

"This ain't the same street," he said.

"No, but our building has an entrance on this street also," returned Howard, "and it's a little nearer to go this way."

"Yeou dew like tew save steps, don't yeou?"

"Steps mean time and time is money, Mr. Hatgood."

"Yes, yeou're just 'bout right."

They entered the New Street door of the building, went up in the elevator to the eighth floor, and a moment later passed through the empty room with desks and into the room where the model of the gold separator was set up.

Another man was there at this time, but not the one who had first spoken to Hatgood on his entrance to the place.

He was introduced to Hatgood as Mr. Maynard, one of the partners in the concern.

"I suppose you've some samples, Mr. Hatgood," said Maynard, quietly.

"Here they be," the farmer replied, opening his bag.

The two then looked at the pieces of rock, remarked that this seemed promising and then placed them in one end of the separator.

"Now this machine," said Maynard, "is a new invention as our letters have told you, that brings the gold out of rock with the least expense.

"There are lots of mines in this country that are not profitable because it costs so much to get the gold out of the rock.

"We believe this machine will make all mines profitable and make it possible for many men to work gold that haven't been able to do so before.

"Of course you won't want to invest in the thing unless you're satisfied that there is gold enough on your place to make it pay.

"You've brought your own samples so that you can be perfectly sure that there's nothing crooked about the work.

"Now, what we're going to do is to grind up these samples into powder, pass that powder over a preparation of mercury which will catch all the gold and leave the worthless stone.

"This scale here shows that you had about twelve pounds of stone in your bag.

"That's just what I reckoned it at home."

"Very well. Now to grind."

The man put his hand to a wheel and

began to turn it; immediately there was a grinding noise.

"Of course," he said, "this is a small machine, and if you had one on your place you would have a steam engine to run it, but for the grinding of samples it's well enough for one of us to turn the crank."

Hatgood nodded.

The grinding was soon done and then Howard went to the other end of the machine and placing his hand upon a tube said:

"Your samples are now passing over the mercury and a moment later I shall open this tube and show the gold that came from them.

"You mustn't be disappointed if there isn't much of it, for it may prove that even with this machine the gold on your place isn't there in quantities sufficient for working it."

"Wal," said Hatgood, "that's just what I want tew find out."

Howard turned a stopcock in the tube holding a dish under it. About a spoonful of yellow powder came out.

"Great Scott!" he exclaimed.

"There ain't much of it," cried Hatgood.

"Much! Why, man alive, I never saw so much from a twelve-pound sample!"

"But is it gold?"

"Pure gold."

"What's it worth?"

"You come with us and we'll find out at once."

The powder was carefully wrapped in paper and the three men left the building and went over to the United States Assay Office on Wall Street.

There the dust was tested and weighed. It proved to be almost exactly five dollars in value.

Nothing was said in the Assay office about the gold separator, but as soon as the men were one the sidewalk again, Maynard said:

"If you'd had experience in mining, Mr. Hatgood, you'd know that this is a most wonderful yield."

"Wal," Hatgood replied, doubtfully, "five dollars for that little lot of stone is more'n I s'pposed 'twas worth, but how 'bout the gineral value of the rocks?"

"Why, see here!" exclaimed Howard, taking out pencil and paper and making a quick calculation, "at that rate, the rocks on your farm would pan out eight hundred and thirty-three dollars to the ton.

"Jerusalem! Mr. Hatgood, but you've struck it rich."

"Gosh!" exclaimed the farmer. "I wonder how many tons of it I've got on my place."

"Enough to make you as rich as any man in the world."

The farmer began to grow excited, as he saw how rapidly his fortune would increase at the rate of eight hundred and thirty-three dollars to a ton.

The two men did not return with him to Drummond and Company's office, but took him to a cafe, where they sat in a private room and talked the thing over.

The result of it was that Hatgood agreed to purchase a large-sized gold separator which they promised to deliver to him within a week.

He was advised not to say much about the matter at home because it might attract a lot of attention that would hurt his prospects.

They told him how he might like to buy up neighboring farms so as to get possession of all the gold-bearing ledges in the vicinity.

"The way to do," they said, "is to get our machine and quietly set it to work in your barn, saying nothing to your neighbors.

"As fast as you have ground out a lot of gold, buy up more ledges and get new machines, and within a few months you will be one of the richest men in the country."

Hatgood's eyes bulged as he listened to this kind of talk and he quickly fell into the arrangement which they suggested, which was that one of them should go with the machine to Berlin and take the pay for it in cash.

They did not make it very clear why cash payment rather than a check or money order should be used, but the farmer was too excited at the prospect of getting rich to ask many questions.

All he wanted was to get one of those wonderful machines on his place, and he would have been glad if he could have

taken one with him that very day. The price of the machine puzzled him somewhat.

"I ain't got as much as two thousand," he said, in a disappointed tone.

"You can borrow that amount on your farm, can't you?" they asked.

"Yes, I guess I could git that much on a mortgage."

"Well, you see for yourself," they continued, "how quickly you could pay off the debt. It would not take many tons at that rate to clear your farm and pay for the machine, too."

The result of it was that Maynard accompanied the farmer back to the Grand Central Station, saw him safely aboard a train and the next week turned up in Berlin with a big machine that he set up in the farmer's barn.

Meantime Hatgood had borrowed two thousand dollars by mortgaging his farm, which amount he paid over to Maynard.

The latter gave him a bill of sale and immediately left the place.

It was three weeks after this when Hatgood called at Nick Carter's house.

Trim happened to be the only detective at home at the time and accordingly asked the caller to explain his business.

"I've been swindled, sir!" cried Hatgood, excitedly.

"I've been did clean up, an' I'm a ruined man if yeou can't help me and recover my money for me.

"I b'lieve yew can dew it, for I've heard all 'bout how yeou found the thief that was robbin' Squire Bowker in East Berlin, which is a part of the town I come from.

"The fact is, Selectman Hubbard give me this note tew yeou."

Trim took the letter that the farmer gave him. It was simply a note of introduction begging Trim if he had time to look after the poor man, who was perfectly honest, but who had been undoubtedly badly treated by New York sharpers.

Trim remembered Selectman Hubbard well; it was not long before this that he had made an investigation in East Berlin in which the selectman was concerned and which had made his name as a detective well known in that country place.*

"All right, Mr. Hatgood," said Trim, after he had read the note. "I'll see what I can do for you. Tell me all about it."

The farmer, therefore, with many repetitions and unnecessary details, told Trim what has already been narrated.

He added that the machine set up in his barn was a humbug from start to finish.

"Talk 'bout grindin' rocks with it," he said, "it couldn't dew a darn thing, an' I don't b'lieve there was a cent's worth of gold on my farm, anyhow."

"You're probably right about that," said Trim. "But you stay here for two or three hours while I run down to Broad street and take a look around.

"I'd like to see for myself what sort of people Drummond and Company are. Make yourself comfortable now and don't worry.

"I think there'll be no difficulty in bringing these swindlers to justice at least, and perhaps we can recover some of your money for you."

The detective, therefore, left the farmer in Nick's house and started down town.

As his trip was to be only one of general observation he did not disguise himself, but went out as if he were upon an ordinary errand.

He was approaching an elevated stairway up which he intended to go when the sign of a laundry which he was passing fell suddenly, struck him on the head and laid him senseless upon the sidewalk.

CHAPTER III.

TRIM FOOLS THE SURGEON.

The detective was unconscious for only a few minutes.

When he began to awake the first thing that attracted his attention was a stifling smell that he recognized instantly as the close, hot air of a Chinese laundry.

He knew, therefore, that he had been picked up and carried inside the laundry before which he had fallen.

This fact instantly made him suspicious. He had had rough experiences in Chinese joints before, and it now occurred to him that perhaps this adventure was part of a put-up job to injure him.

He was too dazed by the blow on his head to realize at first that he had been

* See "Trim in the Dark," No. 29 New Nick Carter Weekly.

struck down in broad daylight in a busy city street and, therefore, it was most unlikely that any attempt would be made at such a time and place to kidnap him.

His suspicions, however, caused him to lie perfectly still, pretending to greater injury than he had really received.

He did not move a muscle, fearing that if he showed any sign of life another blow might be dealt him while he was unable to ward it off.

After a moment, however, he looked through his almost closed eyelashes and saw that he was surrounded by several men who were apparently sympathetic and trying to help him.

He heard a dull murmur of voices, and as he gradually regained consciousness he understood what was being said.

He was lying upon the laundryman's ironing board.

One of the men who stood by had his hand over the detective's heart.

"I can't make out the least sign of life here," this man said, in a grave tone.

"Huh!" thought Trim, "that's because you don't know your business. If you were a surgeon you'd feel my heart beat as strong as ever."

"How in the world did it happen?" asked another, who stood a little back from the table looking over other men's shoulders.

"The laundry sign fell on him," was the reply.

"Was it one of these signs that hang out over the sidewalk?"

"Yes."

"Well, I've always said those things were dangerous."

"Have you?" returned the other in a sarcastic tone.

"Yes, I have; I've tried all I could to get the city authorities to forbid such signs. I believe there's a law against it, but it ain't in force."

"Well, this proves that they are dangerous," said the man, who was trying in a bungling way to revive the detective.

"They would be safe enough if they were put up right," declared another man.

"Sign allee light," cried the laundryman, excitedly.

He stood a little apart from the others looking on in a frightened way.

"How could it be all right when it fell?" demanded one of the men, sharply.

"Me know him allee light," insisted the Chinese. "Me put him up, me nail him vely stlong."

"Oh, you did. Well, then, how did it come down?"

"Bad boy saw him."

"Hey!"

"Bad boy come allong allee samee night cut pole most off so sign fall; that all samee not my fault."

"Don't believe it."

"Me show you."

The Chinese and at least half the crowd of observers went out to the sidewalk to examine the fallen sign and the broken pole.

By this time Trim felt perfectly able to get up and move about, but he lay as still as ever for the explanation of the affair given by the Chinese interested him greatly and turned his suspicions in a new direction.

"It isn't once in a dog's age," he said to himself, "that anything like this happens.

"Of course it's possible that if mischievous boys cut that sign nearly in two it fell on me by accident.

"At first thought it doesn't seem probable that a laundry sign on Twenty-third street should be rigged so as to fall on me of all men in the city; but, on the other hand, Nick and the rest of us have so many enemies that it isn't impossible for some such job as this to be arranged to do us harm.

"The more I think of it the more likely it seems, for I take a train at this station rather more often than at any other.

"Why isn't it possible, then, that that sign has been prepared to fall on me for several days and that the opportunity occurred now for the first time.

"I don't believe I want to wake up until I've been able to learn more about it."

A moment later the men who had gone out with the Chinese returned to the laundry, talking excitedly.

They had become satisfied that the laundryman's story was correct; it was as plain as could be that the pole to which

the sign was attached had been cut partly in two.

They asked many wondering questions of each other as to who should have done the job and why.

"Ah Sin struck it right at the first go-off," said one of the men quietly.

"How so?"

"Don't you remember that he suggested that mischievous boys had cut the pole?"

"So he did."

"That tells the whole story; it was done simply for mischief, and if there had happened to be a high wind blowing the sign might have broken off where there was nobody passing or it might have fallen and struck somebody else.

"It just happens that this man was passing underneath when the sign fell and so he got the benefit of it, that's all."

Trim lay so that he could watch the man who made this explanation without opening his eyes further.

"Seems to me," the detective thought, "he's rather anxious to prove the mischief theory, and he goes out of his way to suggest indirectly that the mischief might have been done for the purpose of injuring somebody.

"Why should he remark that it just happened to be this man who got the benefit of the break; I guess the reason is because he had that very same plan in mind. His talk isn't natural.

"Nobody here dreams that this was anything more than accident. I shouldn't wonder, mister, if your mind was so full of this thing that you can't help exposing your hand."

"Benefit!" exclaimed one of the others, "I shouldn't say it was much benefit to a man to get killed by a sign falling on him."

"Well, is he killed?" asked the man who had especially interested Trim.

"I can't say for certain, but there comes the ambulance and the surgeon will soon know."

A moment later an ambulance surgeon came hustling into the laundry and the men stood aside to let him examine the victim of the accident.

The examination was quickly made; the surgeon put his ear over Trim's heart and listened for a moment, then he held a hand-glass close to the detective's nostrils, Trim held his breath and the surgeon looked doubtful.

"Is he dead?" asked the man whose talk had interested the detective especially.

"Not yet," was the surgeon's reply.

"Can't recover, can he?" was the next question.

The surgeon did not answer, but beckoned to his assistant, who brought in a stretcher.

Trim was laid upon it and carried into the ambulance, where as soon as he was screened from observation by the crowd he turned upon his side and put his hands to his face.

The surgeon did not seem to notice this act, and he certainly did not see that Trim's fingers were working upon his face rapidly.

There was a moment's delay while the driver and others connected with the ambulance were getting to their places, then with a clang of the bell they started off for Bellevue Hospital.

This hospital is situated on the bank of the East River at the foot of Twenty-sixth street, and to reach it the ambulance had to pass under the elevated station at the crossing of Twenty-third street and Third Avenue.

This was the station to which Trim was bound when the falling of the sign interrupted his journey.

The driver had the surgeon's assistant upon the seat in front and their backs, therefore, were turned to the detective.

The surgeon himself sat on the seat at the rear open end of the ambulance.

He was not paying any especial attention to Trim, for to him the matter was a commonplace one, and there was nothing to be done about it until the victim had been taken to the hospital.

Just as the ambulance was underneath the station Trim, looking through the open back, saw the man who had interested him climbing the stairs upon the downtown side, then the ambulance surgeon experienced the biggest surprise in his life.

The man who had been lying apparently perfectly still and unconscious on the stretcher suddenly jumped up, caught the surgeon by the shoulders, yanked him from the seat and threw him full length

upon the bottom of the ambulance and then jumped out.

This was surprising enough but it was not all of it.

The surgeon would have taken his oath that the man who leaped up and floored him was not the victim of the accident.

When the surgeon arrived at the laundry he found there on the ironing table the unconscious body of a young man.

He supposed that it was this man that had been carried on the stretcher into the ambulance, but the person who assaulted him so unexpectedly and leaped out had a short gray beard upon his chin, wrinkles upon his face and a big red nose, very unlike that of the pale young fellow who had been hit with the sign.

The surgeon scrambled to his feet and called excitedly to the driver to stop.

The driver looked around, saw that the supposed victim was missing, and pulled up at the curb on the other side of the avenue.

"What in thunder is the matter?" he cried.

"Blest if I know," the surgeon answered in great confusion. "He's gone, or somebody's gone."

"The fellow that was most killed?"

"How do I know? Who in the world was it you put in here?"

"We put in the man who was lying in the laundry, of course."

"Well, that's what I thought, but that wasn't the fellow that got out just now."

"Then who was it?"

So they asked stupid, excited questions of each other for a minute or two, while a new crowd gathered around trying to make out what was the cause of the disturbance.

Therefore, it happened that when they got their senses sufficiently to recross the avenue and hunt for the victim of the accident he was nowhere to be found.

One or two idlers in the vicinity said they had seen a man running toward the elevated stairway, and there was one man who declared that he had seen somebody get down from the ambulance.

The surgeon, however, did not get any clear information upon the matter, and although he went up to the elevated station he did not find there either the victim of the accident or the strange fellow who had suddenly risen in the ambulance and fought his way out.

He described the man who had escaped from the ambulance as well as he could, and the ticket chopper thought he had seen such a man board the last down train.

This was all the information the surgeon could get, and so he had to return to the hospital, where he made the best report he could under the circumstances.

Meantime the detective was not a bit satisfied with the way his scheme had worked.

It did not do him any good to reflect that he had disguised himself quickly, and got out of the ambulance without delay, for, although he had hurried with all his might the man whom he wished to shadow had arrived at the station platform just in time to step upon a downtown train and when Trim got there the train had passed.

Another one was just coming in, and Trim got on it in order to avoid just the pursuit that the ambulance surgeon made.

CHAPTER IV.

ON AND OFF THE SCENT.

"This is tough luck, and no mistake," grumbled Trim to himself, as his train rolled downtown. "I'd be willing to bet my last dollar that that man knew more about the falling of the sign than anybody else in the crowd, and here I've gone and lost him.

"However, it couldn't be helped. I should have spoiled all my chances if I had shown any consciousness while he was looking on, and it was simply a bit of bad luck that he got a train ahead of me.

"No use of wasting any more thought about the matter, for if it was a put up job the truth is sure to come out some time, for the man who did the business will be up to some mischief now that he thinks that I'm out of his way.

"I'll get on to him sooner or later, dead sure, and meantime I'll go ahead with my investigation for poor old Hatgood.

"I wonder what train this is, anyway."

The detective had been in such a hurry

that he had not noticed the signals upon the engine when the train stopped at Twenty-third Street. So he asked a guard.

"City Hall train," responded the guard. "Change at Chatham Square for South Ferry."

Trim decided to make the change because as he was bound for Broad Street he would have a shorter walk from Hanover Square than from City Hall.

He did not wait, however, until the train reached Chatham Square before changing.

He was so familiar with the system of trains on the Third Avenue "L" that he knew that a South Ferry train would follow immediately after the one he was in, so he got out at Houston street to wait for it.

When the South Ferry train came along, which it did a minute or two later, several passengers got off from the rear car where Trim was waiting to board.

He stood aside, of course, to let them pass, and saw a young fellow pick up a tin box from underneath the forward seat and thrust it under his coat.

"Hello, there's a sneak thief!" thought the detective. "I wonder what he thinks is in that box?"

This young fellow was the last to leave the car.

The guard stood with one hand upon the bell-rope and the other upon the gate as he stepped off.

Trim caught the thief by the collar, yanked him around as if he had been a bundle of straw, ripped open his coat and took out the box.

"Lem me go!" gasped the sneak thief, in great fright.

"Darn the cuss!" exclaimed the guard, dropping the bell-rope and gate handle, "but he's got my dinner!"

"No, he hasn't," retorted Trim, handing the tin box to the guard, "there it is."

The station master rang the signal bell sharply at that moment, for it was past the time when the train should pass on.

The guard hastily yanked the cord, while Trim wheeled the sneak thief around once more, gave him a kick that sent him reeling along the platform and boarded the car laughing.

"Lucky I happened to see him, wasn't it?" he remarked.

"Well, it was lucky for me," responded the guard. "A dinner ain't much to steal, but it's a good deal to lose when you've got a long day's work to do."

"That's where you're right," Trim responded.

"I'd have felt mighty bad if I'd missed that dinner," continued the guard. "I don't have time to go home and sometimes I don't get time to go to a restaurant, even if I have the price for it, which I haven't to-day, so I'm mighty obliged to you for saving my dinner for me."

"That's all right," said Trim, "I enjoyed it, and I reckon that fellow is too scared and sore to try to pinch anything else for the rest of this day."

"He ought to get locked up for it," the guard continued, as he went into the next car to call out the station.

This little adventure was entirely forgotten by Trim before the train had come to Chatham Square.

A couple of policemen boarded the train at that station and walked through the entire length, coming to Trim's car last.

They were looking at the passengers as they went along, and when they came to Trim one of them stopped and said, doubtfully:

"I guess this is the fellow."

Trim looked up innocently.

"Where did you get on?" asked one of the policemen.

"At Houston street," the detective answered, quickly, for he suspected what was coming.

"Guess not!" returned the other, and he glanced at a paper he held in his hand.

"Medium size," he read, "gray beard, big red nose; that's the man, Jim!"

"Better make sure of it!" said the other policeman. "It's hardly likely, you know, he'd be on this train; we didn't find him on the other."

"What's the matter, anyhow?" said Trim.

"Didn't you get hit with a falling sign on Twenty-third street?" asked the policeman.

"Me? Well, I guess not! Do I look as if I'd been hit?"

"No, you don't, but the man who got out of the ambulance didn't look so, neither."

"I don't know what you're talking about," said the detective.

The guard approached and listened interestedly.

"What's up?" he asked.

"Why, it's this way," answered one of the policemen; "some fellow escaped from the Bellevue ambulance on Twenty-third street and went up to the down-town station and took a train.

"His description was telegraphed down the line, and we got on the train he took at Grand street.

"We went through it, but he was not there, so we got off at Chatham Square and boarded this train to see if we could find him here. We think this is the man."

The guard looked at Trim in a surprised way while the policemen were consulting the description.

The detective gave the guard a sly wink.

"Huh!" exclaimed the guard, "you're way off."

"Can't be!" returned the officer, "here's the description plain as day."

"I don't care anything about that," retorted the guard, "there's more than one man in this city with a gray beard and a big nose, isn't there?"

"Of course there is, but——"

"There ain't any but about it! This man got on the train at Houston street, see?"

The policeman looked as if he did not believe it.

"How can you tell one passenger from another?" he demanded, "with so many getting on and off all the time! It ain't likely you'd remember where this man got on."

"I've got good reason to remember it," insisted the guard. "He saved my dinner for me!"

"Hey?"

The guard then told what had happened when the train arrived at Houston street and the policemen were convinced that Trim was not the man they were looking for.

They got off the train at Franklin Square entirely satisfied that they had been on a wild-goose chase.

"I reckon we might call it square now," said Trim to the guard, when the train passed on.

"Why?"

"I saved your dinner and you saved me from arrest."

"Well, of course, but——"

"I was the man they were looking for."

"You don't mean it!"

"Yes, but there's no harm done, for I shall explain the matter to the police when I get good and ready.

"Meantime, if anybody should happen to steal your dinner later in the day go to a restaurant and have a good square meal on me."

Saying this, Trim slipped a bill into the guard's hand and added, in a whisper:

"You needn't fear that it is stolen goods, for my name's Trim Carter."

"The detective?"

"The same."

"Gee whiz!"

The train was just stopping at Hanover Square, and the guard had to leave the detective to call out the station.

Trim got off there, and the last he saw of the guard was a wondering face staring at him from the last platform of the departing train.

Trim was greatly amused by his little adventure, but he ceased thinking of it as soon as he got down to the street and began to walk toward Broad street.

"This has been a pleasant little excursion so far," he said to himself, "but now I've got to get my think tank to work on old Hatgood's matter.

"I don't see any reason for changing my first plan, and in fact now that I'm disguised a bit, it'll work rather better."

Accordingly he went straight to the building that Hatgood had described to him, saw that Drummond and Company were, indeed, located there, went up in the elevator to the eighth floor and opened the door of their office.

A boy rose to meet him just as had been the case when Hatgood called.

"Who do you wish to see, sir?" the boy asked.

"Anybody connected with the con-

cern," Trim answered, looking around curiously.

"Write your name and business on this," said the boy, handing him a card.

Trim wrote Josiah Brown upon the card for a name, and added the word "mining" under it.

"I reckon he'll understand from that," he said.

The boy glanced doubtfully at the card, told the visitor to sit down, and went into the inner room.

After a moment or two the boy returned and told Trim that he would have to state his business more exactly.

"Wal," said Trim, with a drawl, "I want tew talk 'bout the gold separator of course."

"Do you own a mine?" asked the boy.

"Maybe."

"Mr. Drummond wants to know because he is very busy and don't want to waste time."

"Yeou tell him," interrupted Trim, sharply, "that I'm here on business and that I'll talk business with him and not with his office boy."

The boy scowled and went again into the inner room.

A little later an elderly man appeared in the doorway, glanced at Trim hastily and then said:

"Come this way, Mr. Brown."

Trim went in and the first thing he saw was the model of a machine set as Hatgood had described to him.

Two or three men were seated at desks near the windows and the elderly man conducted him past them and into a small private office.

There he pointed to a chair and sat down before a big desk.

"Well, sir," he said, as soon as Trim seated himself.

"I've had a good deal tew dew with mining," the detective began, "an' of course I'm interested in anything new in the way of a gold separator. I never heerd of yours 'till lately."

"I hope you haven't heard anything but good about it?" said the other.

"Wal, maybe an' maybe not!" Trim answered; "but before I talk business 'bout it I'd like to see the thing tested."

The elderly man frowned impatiently.

"I was afraid so!" he muttered.

Trim said nothing, but looked curiously at him.

"You haven't got a pocketful of samples, or a lot of rock in a gripsack, have you?" asked the elderly man.

Trim shook his head.

"I can bring you samples soon 'nough if that's what you want," he said.

"That's just what we don't want!" was the reply. "I will be very frank with you, Mr. Brown, for I don't want to waste your time, and my own time is too valuable.

"My name is Drummond, and I and my partners have a gold separator, the model of which is set up in the other room, which we are locating in various parts of the country.

"It's a good thing. It's been on the market a long time and there's no question about it, but the machine can't turn paving stones into gold bricks, and it can't turn an ordinary farm into a gold mine.

"If you've got a mine that can't be worked profitably by the ordinary methods I advise you to look into our machine, for it might be the means of making your property valuable, but if you simply got some rocks on your place that somebody has told you contains gold you'd better not come here."

"Wall," said Trim, somewhat surprised at this talk, "I heerd yeou'd a model of yeour machine here and I thought yeou could show a man how it worked."

"A good many people seem to have got that impression," returned Drummond, impatiently; "it has put us to no end of trouble.

"There's hardly a day passes but that some probably well-meaning man comes here with a lot of worthless rock for us to test.

"We're not in that business, and we're not trying to make people think that we've got gold mines when they simply own a lot of useless rocks.

"I suppose it's natural enough for inexperienced men to imagine that because we've got a gold separator it's easy enough to turn their samples into dust, but it isn't.

"The model out there is simply for exhibition to experienced miners.

"We can explain to them just how it

works, and they can see it as clearly as-if it was in operation."

"Then it don't work at all?" remarked Trim.

"Of course it doesn't. Now, if you're a miner and are thinking of putting up a new plant, why, I shall be very glad to have one of my men explain the separator to you. If you are not, I advise you not to waste your time with it.

"You see," continued Drummond, kindly, "we've been greatly annoyed by farmers from all parts of the country coming here with what they call samples of rock.

"Poor fellows, they've had the gold fever, I suppose, and gone to the expense of a journey to New York all for nothing.

"We have tried to make it plain to them that they have come on a foolish errand, and we have tried to send them home in a better state of mind; generally we seem to succeed, but sometimes they seem to think that it's our fault that their worthless farms are not turned into bonanzas.

"You see, that makes me kind of tired of speaking to strangers about the matter."

"Yes, I should think it might," responded Trim. "I don't want ter take your time unnecessarily, but I dew think it will be business for yeou if yeou'll explain that model to me."

Drummond looked hard at the caller for a moment and then said:

"All right."

He thereupon took Trim into the other room and for twenty minutes explained the workings of the model.

Now, Trim knew a good deal about mining; most of his boyhood had been passed in mining districts and a good deal of his detective work had taken him among the mines of the far West.

It was, therefore, clear to him that this separator was not a fake. It might not be the best thing possible, but he was almost convinced that there was no swindle about it.

The result was that when he said good-day to Mr. Drummond, and remarked that he would call again, he was more puzzled than he was at the time when Hatgood told the story of his experience.

From Hatgood's account the detective had supposed that it would be a simple enough thing to set a trap for Drummond & Company and so expose their operations.

Now, after his shrewdest questions, he could not see any evidence of crooked business.

He stepped out into the corridor feeling that it was going to be a harder matter than he thought to work Hatgood's case successfully, and just as he closed the door of Drummond's office he saw a man entering a door further down the corridor and upon the other side of it.

This was the man whom he had seen in the laundry and whom he had vainly tried to shadow.

"What luck," thought the detective, "now while I'm puzzling over what to do for Hatgood I can just keep my eyes on that fellow and find out what he's up to."

He went down the corridor to the door that the man had entered.

There was no sign upon the door. Trim cautiously turned the handle and found that the door was locked.

He, therefore, walked up and down the corridor for awhile waiting for the man to come out.

"It won't do," he thought, "to ask the janitor about the occupant of that room, for if the man who went in there really has it in for me he would be likely to learn that questions were being asked, and that would put him on his guard.

"He probably thinks that I'm in the hospital now and if I wait long enough I'll get on his track again."

Trim waited, but hours came and went and no one either entered or went out of that room.

He saw Drummond leave his office for home, and one after another all the tenants of the building went away.

At last the janitor himself came up into the corridor and informed Trim that it was time to close the building for the night.

Trim was exasperated.

He felt as if most of the day had been wasted, but there was nothing to do but accept the situation and make the best of it, so he went down in the elevator and when he arrived at the bottom he saw that there was a way by which the man

whom he was shadowing might have got out unobserved.

The building had two corridors, and two sets of elevators. The man might have gone from the room which he had entered into the other corridor and so out by way of New street.

"That's what he's done," thought Trim, but if he's been here once he'll come again and I'll find him yet.

"Meantime I've got some new questions to ask old Hatgood."

CHAPTER V.

A TIP FROM THE HOSPITAL.

In most respects, Hatgood's story of his experiences seemed to agree with what Trim had discovered.

There was the office of Drummond & Company just where he said it was.

There was the model of the gold separator and there was Drummond himself, whom Trim recognized from Hatgood's description as the one who had met the old man on his first entrance into the office.

Trim did not recognize anybody else in Drummond & Co.'s office, but that did not surprise him.

In the first place the farmer's descriptions were not at all clear, and in the second there was no reason to suppose that either Howard or Maynard would be in the office at all hours of the day.

There was one thing, however, in which the old man's story seemed to be shaky.

He had spoken quite positively about the grinding of his samples in the model of the gold separator.

The model that Trim looked at was not in condition to grind so much as a kernel of coffee to say nothing of cobble stones.

The detective had looked at it for the very purpose of discovering what sort of contrivance was concealed in it for doing fake grinding.

He had not been able to see any way by which this could be accomplished, and yet Hatgood had told him how his samples of rock were dropped into the machine and how one of the swindlers had turned a crank wheel which caused a loud grinding noise.

It occurred to Trim as possible that there might be another machine in Drummond & Co.'s offices which could be set up in place of the one first seen and which could be used for dishonest purposes.

The fact that old Hatgood had been taken out to luncheon after his first visit suggested this thought, for that would give the operators time to take down the real model and set up the fake.

There was a strong objection to that theory.

In the first place, the model was a big affair which would take time to remove and in the second place there was no way of hiding it in the offices.

Trim had taken pains to look the offices over very carefully to see if he could see any sign of another machine that might be set up to do the dishonest work.

There was none, and he was convinced that somewhere or other there was a screw loose in Hatgood's story.

"There's a shrewd game going on in Broad street," he reflected, "and it may be that Drummond & Company have got a hand in it, but at present I can't believe that they are swindlers."

"Well, mister," said old Hatgood, when Trim arrived home, "did you find them?"

"I'm not so sure about that," the detective answered, "but I guess they found me."

The old man looked disappointed. He did not catch the meaning of Trim's reply, but he saw that the detective had not finished the case.

"I was hopin'," he said, "from the slick way in which yeou done up the feller that robbed Squire Bowker in East Berlin, that yeou'd get these fellers by the scruff of the neck afore sunset."

"You mustn't expect too much," Trim responded. "Detectives sometimes fail, you know."

"Dew tell! I thought they always ketched criminals. I'm right sorry that yeou haven't got 'em, 'cause it took just 'bout my last dollar tew git down here tew New York an' I can't stay no longer 'cause I hain't got money n'ouh tew put up at a tavern."

"Isn't this place good enough for you?" asked Trim.

"What! this here house?"

"That's what I mean."

"It's the best house I ever seed in all my life."

"You can stay here as long as is necessary."

"What! without no charge tew it?"

"There will be nothing to pay, Mr. Hatgood, unless I succeed in running your swindlers to earth and getting back a good share of your money; but you must understand that the last part is the hardest.

"It isn't very likely that I can catch the criminals with any money that can be proved to be yours."

"I'm obleeged tew yeou, young man, for 'lowin' of me tew stay here, but I'm awfully anxious tew git some of my money back.

"I s'pose that's why they made me pay in cash, 'stead of by check or postoffice money order."

"Yes, unless——"

Trim thought a moment.

He saw a new suggestion in the fact that the old man had been compelled to pay money for his fake machine.

"A check or money order made payable to Drummond & Company," he thought, "might be traced.

"Cash can't be traced further than the hands of the man who received it. Perhaps that man Drummond is a swindler after all."

He began then on the questions that he wanted to ask his client.

It is not necessary to repeat many of them for what Trim did was to make the old man tell the story again.

The statement of facts was not very different from that of the first account.

The farmer was positive that he had seen the model at work and had heard the grinding noise.

"Now, then," said Trim at last, "when you found that the thing they set up in your barn wouldn't work, what did you do?"

"I wrote to Drummond & Company that they'd better send up a man tew fix the darned thing."

"Did you get an answer?"

"Yes, I did."

"What did it say?"

"It said the thing was all right but perhaps it needed ile. I iled it and iled it; the wheels would go round, but it wouldn't grind."

"What did you do then?"

"I wrote them another letter."

"And did they answer that?"

"Yes."

"What did they say this time?"

"They said that the man who had charge of such matters was lookin' at a machine in another part of the country an' that he'd be back in a few weeks.

"When he came back they said they'd send him up tew look the thing over."

"What did you do then?"

"Wal, I was feelin' awful sore 'bout it an' I began tew think that I'd been swindled, an' 'twas on my mind so much that I couldn't help tellin' Selectman Hubbard 'bout it one evenin' when I was over tew his store in East Berlin.

"He was mighty interested an' he come over tew my farm next day tew look at the thing.

"He said 'twas a swindle an' no mistake; but, says he, there's a man in New York that kin fix yeou all right on that, an' he's the only one that kin save yeou!"

"I understand," said Trim, "he gave you the letter of introduction to me and you came on?"

"Yes, but not right away."

"Well, what did you do first, then?"

"I wrote another letter tew Drummond & Company."

"Oh, you did!"

Trim began to see what was coming.

"Yes, I thought I'd see if I couldn't scare 'em intew payin' up what they robbed me of an' so save the expense of comin' tew New York tew see yeou."

"Well, what did you write them?"

"I tole 'em right straight out that ef they didn't pay me up I should come tew New York an' set detective Carter ontew 'em, I did!"

Trim gave a low whistle.

"Did you give them any definite time in which to answer?" he asked.

"Yes, I tole 'em I'd give 'em just one week tew settle an' ef I didn't hear from 'em in that time I should come on."

"That explains a good deal."

"Does it?"

"Yes, but it doesn't help matters any, my friend."

The old man looked sadly disappointed again and it was a minute or two before Trim found anything to say.

He felt considerably disgusted that his client should have taken this course.

"It's clear 'nough now," he said to himself, "that the laundry man's sign was rigged to fall on me.

"Here these fellows had a tip from Hatgood that he was going to call here, so they had all the chance they needed to study my movements and get acquainted with me.

"They knew what day he would come and without a doubt, shadowed him right to this house.

"They may have had that sign fixed for me for a week for they were certain that the time would come sooner or later when I would walk under it.

"There's another thing that's certain and that is hopeful. The man that I've been trying to shadow to-day must be one of Hatgood's swindlers.

"I think I've located him and with that clew I believe I can finish the job.

"The more I think of it when I'm up here the more it seems that Drummond & Company must be swindlers, but when I'm down near them I can't believe it.

"There must be a hidden game here somewhere that I haven't yet tumbled to."

Trim comforted the old man as well as he could but without giving him much hope that his money would be recovered.

Early the next forenoon the detective went to a commercial agency where he was acquainted and made some inquiries about Drummond & Company.

He found there, quite as he expected, that the firm stood high. It was said to do a large and safe business, and to be altogether above suspicion as to its honesty.

The detective's next call was upon the agent of the building where Drummond & Company had their offices.

He said there that he wanted to hire an office and asked if there were any vacant ones in the building.

He learned that there were two or three but something was wrong about each one of them.

The rent was too high or the location was unpleasant.

"I wouldn't go on the top floor of the building," he said, "because there's altogether too much air stirring up there and I don't want your ground floor offices because they're too dark."

"Then I'm afraid we can't do anything for you," the agent said, "because there's nothing else vacant in the building."

"What's the matter with the eighth floor?" Trim asked.

"The eighth floor is all taken."

"Then I must be mistaken," responded Trim, "but I thought in looking through the building that I saw one set of offices that was vacant."

The agent shook his head.

"There's one on the west side of the corridor!" insisted Trim, "that has no name on the door."

"Oh! you mean room 815?"

"I believe that's the number."

"Well, that's occupied just the same; I don't know why the tenants haven't put up their card, but the rooms there are let for an entire year."

"Who is the tenant? I ask because they might sublet at least desk room to me."

"I don't think they will, but you can try them, of course. It's the Denver Milling Company that runs those rooms. They use them for storing purposes, I believe."

"Storing what?"

"Some kind of machinery that they control; I don't know what it is."

"All right I'll look them up."

Trim went away but he did not go to room 815.

"That's about the highest priced store room I ever heard of," he said to himself.

"The Denver Milling Company, huh! I can't believe that any concern would pay the rents of this building just for the purpose of storing machinery.

"I must see what I can find out about the Denver Milling Company."

Trim traveled back to the commercial agency. The people there could tell him nothing about the Denver Milling Company; they had never heard of any such concern, in fact they did not believe that any such concern existed.

"I reckon I'm getting on," thought

Trim, as he left that place for the second time.

He was on his way to Broad street again when a man jumped from a passing cable car and ran up to him.

"Hello, Trim," he said, "I was up to your house to see you an hour or two ago."

"Hello, Doc," responded the detective. "What's up?"

"That's what I called to ask you!" was the reply, "and I'm mighty glad that I ran across you on the street."

Trim looked sharply at his friend. He was a young physician. Trim saw that he was very much in earnest.

"Let's get into the private room of some cafe," suggested the detective, "and you can tell me about it."

They were not long in finding a place where they could converse freely.

"I'm not going to ask any impertinent questions, Trim," the doctor began, "but I'm inclined to think that I can give you some information that will be of use."

"That's what I thought from the way you spoke," Trim answered. "Go ahead."

"Well, to begin with," said the doctor, "aren't you the man who got a rap on the head yesterday by a falling sign on Twenty-third street?"

Trim smiled.

"That's not a bad guess," he said; "how did you happen to hit it?"

"Well," the doctor answered, "I'm on the staff of physicians at Bellevue now, you know——"

"No, I didn't know it; I congratulate you."

"Thanks. I was on duty there yesterday when the call came in for an ambulance to go to Twenty-third street."

"Well?"

"The ambulance went and came back empty."

"Rather funny."

"Oh, no, not at all; that often happens."

"Yes, so it does."

"Sometimes, you know, the ambulance surgeon gets to the scene of the accident and finds that the victim is dead; of course he doesn't use the ambulance to bring a dead man to the hospital!"

"Certainly not."

"I thought this was the case on this occasion and I said something to that effect to the surgeon in charge of the ambulance."

"What did he say?" asked Trim, with a grin.

"Why, he was nervous and embarrassed and was mighty slow about making out his report; finally he blurted out the facts."

"How did he put it?"

"'Doctor,' he said, 'I've been hunkooed!'"

Trim laughed heartily.

"It's not easy for an ambulance surgeon to be thrown by an unconscious victim, is it?" he asked.

"Well, hardly," responded the doctor, "but that might have been understood if it hadn't been that the surgeon insisted that the victim of the accident had gone through a complete transformation while lying there on the stretcher.

"Of course this was absolutely incredible!"

"Utterly impossible!" said Trim, smiling.

The doctor smiled slightly and went on.

"I made him tell it to me as clearly as he could, and although he's a medical man himself, nothing could persuade him that the victim of the accident hadn't turned forty years older during the few minutes that he lay there in the ambulance.

"Now, as that surgeon is an intelligent man, I was obliged to believe his story, of course, but I didn't believe that the victim of the accident had grown forty years older in five or ten minutes."

"That was very wise of you."

"So I tried my level best to see some explanation of the affair, but all day yesterday and last evening, as long as I was awake, I couldn't make head or tail of it."

"I suppose," said Trim, "that I ought to have sent word around to the hospital to explain, for of course I wouldn't want to get the surgeon into a scrape."

"Oh! he isn't in a scrape and it proved unnecessary for you to send an explanation."

"Why?"

"I found out all about it this morning."

Trim looked a little surprised.

"How did you find out?" he asked.

"Why, early this morning a man came into the hospital office and told the clerk in charge that he had called to inquire how Detective Carter had passed the night."

"Great Scott!" exclaimed Trim, jumping up. "Describe that man, will you?"

CHAPTER VI.

TRIM'S GIANT SWING.

The doctor could not do it.

"I didn't see the caller," he said.

"Confound it!" said Trim, sitting down again.

"I thought I was doing pretty well," continued the doctor, "to tumble to the situation and let you know about it."

"Certainly you did and I'm very much obliged, but haven't you got any idea what that man looked like?"

"No. The clerk paid no especial attention to him."

"What did the clerk do?"

"Why, he looked through the book to find the record of cases that came in yesterday and of course he found no reference to Detective Carter."

"Well?"

"Then he inquired of some of the attendants and they knew nothing about you or any one of your name being in the hospital at that time, so the clerk told the inquirer that Detective Carter was not in the hospital, and he went away."

"Didn't he say anything?"

"Nothing especial that I know of."

"When did you learn of it?"

"Oh, half an hour or so after he had left. The clerk just mentioned that somebody had got the notion that Carter was in the hospital; then it flashed upon me that probably it was you who got hit with the sign, and that for some purpose of your own you feigned unconsciousness, disguised yourself while lying on the stretcher——"

"Yes, of course you tumbled to the whole thing then," interrupted Trim. "You're right and I'm immensely obliged to you for giving me this tip."

"Will it do you any good?"

"It ought to, for it shows that a man I'm after is on his guard. He thought he had done me up by that sign racket and now he knows at least that I wasn't badly enough injured to be laid up in the hospital.

"Probably he's found out also by this time that I got away from the ambulance.

"Yes, I'm glad to know that he called to inquire for me, and of course it makes it necessary for me to work all the faster."

Trim and the doctor then separated and the detective returned to Broad street.

He was beginning now to see light on Hatgood's matter. He still thought it possible that Drummond & Company might be engaged in swindling operations as well as in lawful business, but he was more inclined to think that swindlers had used the firm's name as a decoy to trap unsuspecting countrymen.

He was now particularly anxious to get a look into the offices of the Denver Milling Company, for he believed that there he should find the solution of the mystery.

He went first to room 815, tried the door and knocked on it. There was no response.

Choosing a moment when nobody was in the corridor he used his pick lock and turned back the bolt; even after that the door would not open.

"It's fastened with hand bolts on the inside," thought Trim. "That being the case I must lock the door again, for it's almost a certainty that if there are hand bolts inside, somebody is in there now and if that somebody has heard me fooling with the lock, or finds it unlocked later, there may be difficulty in following out my plans."

Accordingly Trim cautiously locked the door again and left the building.

He walked through Exchange Place to New Street and examined the buildings that stood near to the one in which Drummond & Company had their offices.

Upon the eighth floor of the New street side he saw a window that he believed opened into one of the offices rented by the so-called Denver Milling Company.

After he had become satisfied that he was right in this he went into one build-

ing after another, pretending to look for vacant offices.

The janitor showed him about on the various floors but the detective never found anything to satisfy him until at last he came to an empty office in a building whose main entrance was on Broadway.

The back windows of this building, however, looked out upon New Street and from this office which was in the ninth story, Trim could look across the street and almost into the rooms he was so anxious to examine.

He then found what he could not see from the street below that there was a dark green curtain hanging inside the opposite office which of course prevented him from looking into it.

"That curtain may be there just to keep out the afternoon sun," he reflected, "and anyhow it's likely to be raised some time or other.

"I think I'd better engage this office ——"

He checked his thoughts, opened the window of the vacant office and looked out and upward.

"I'll take this office!" he said, when he drew his head in.

Arrangements were soon made and within an hour Trim was the tenant of this new office.

He took the agent of the building partly into his confidence and thus gained permission to enter the building at any time of the night, being provided with a special key to open the outside doors.

As soon as he had got possession of his office, Trim sat down in the window and watched the green curtain across the way.

He had a spy glass in is hand ready to use the instant that curtain should be raised.

An hour passed and still the curtain remained down.

"This won't do," he thought, "it's wasting time, for if that curtain is there to conceal whatever is in the room it'll never be raised.

"I've got to get in there; more than that, if I'm going to convict these men of swindling I've got to get further proofs than poor old Hatgood's story.

"I must manage somehow to catch them at it. I'm pretty certain that I see a way of getting into that room.

"Now, then, how can I fix it so that I can catch them at work? It would be possible to hang around Broad street and arrest the man whom I saw in the Chinese laundry.

"He's probably the same man who inquired for me at the hospital, but suppose I should arrest him, what good would that do! I've nothing against him except Hatgood's story which would not be very good evidence, and if we should then break into the room of the Denver Milling Company we might not find a thing that would help us.

"No! the gang has got to be caught doing something that's crooked. Ah! I have it!"

With this Trim immediately left his office and went over to Nick Carter's "down town shop," a room not far from Broad Street, where the great detective kept a number of disguises and various other articles that were useful to him in his business.

It sometimes happened that he wanted such things in a hurry and by having them down in this part of the city he saved the time that would otherwise be used in going home for them.

Trim found what he wanted and packed it in a small parcel that he could easily take in his hand.

With this he returned to his office and left in there; the rest of the afternoon he spent in idling about Broad street.

He was not surprised to see the man whom he had shadowed the day before, but the detective made no move to arrest him.

"Unless you take flight, my friend," he said to himself, "I shall have you in my clutches before to-morrow night, but so far as I'm concerned you're free today."

Late in the afternoon Trim saw this man leave Broad street and go to an elevated railroad station where he took an uptown train.

Trim shadowed him to a flat in Harlem where he made certain that the man lived.

A few skilful inquiries in the neighborhood proved that the man was sup-

posed to be a respectable business man with offices far down town.

Trim was well satisfied that the man, even if he feared that one of the Carters was after him, would make no attempt to leave town that night.

Accordingly he took dinner at a hotel and late in the evening returned to his office.

He let himself into the building by the Broadway entrance and climbed the long flights of stairs to the empty room that he had rented.

When he arrived there the first thing that he did was to look across to the building on the other side of New Street.

Every window was dark. Nobody was stirring in the vicinity.

All the streets in that part of the city at night are as quiet as a country village.

Nevertheless Trim waited for a couple of hours before putting his plan into operation.

He wanted to be certain that what he was about to do should not be seen by any chance passer in the street below.

The plan he had made was a very daring one. He was about to risk his life in order to get a sight of what was inside the office across the street.

When he had looked out of the window of his office at the time he was examining it, he had seen that telegraph and telephone wires ran from the top of his building to the top of the other.

A perfect network of them crossed New Street just at this point. They were far above his head.

The window of the room which he wished to get into was nine or ten feet lower than his own office.

Trim was perfectly confident that he could accomplish what he was about to try and shortly after midnight he made the attempt.

Among the things that he had taken to his office was a long cord, a small iron bolt and several yards of clothes line.

When it was time for him to prepare for his dangerous attempt he tied one end of the cord to the bolt, pulled down the upper half of his window and climbed out.

Standing upon the window ledge he held on by the frame with one hand, while in the other hand he had the iron bolt, the cord to which it was tied was reeled up and held loosely across his palm.

Looking straight up from where he stood he could just see the network of telegraph wires considerably above his head.

Balancing himself for a moment he threw the iron bolt as hard as he could up into the air.

As it went up the cord unreeled and his hand closed hard over the free end.

He heard a little twang as the bolt struck one of the wires, then it began to fall.

It went straight down past him and at last stopped when all the cord had been paid out.

Trim's first experiment was a failure.

He pulled the bolt up again, reeled the cord and again threw the bolt upward.

This time the little piece of iron not only went up as far as the network of wires, but in falling went over one of the wires dragging the cord with it.

The result was that when it came down it came down only as far as Trim would permit it to, for he held on to the other end of the cord which was now running across a telegraph wire.

Presently, therefore, he had the bolt back in his hand.

When he had accomplished this he tied the clothes line to the cord and then pulled on the cord until the clothes line rose up to the telegraph wire, crossed it and came down leaving the two ends in Trim's hands.

It was then slack and Trim assumed that with the sagging of the wire and the stretching of the clothes line, the ends would fall just about as low as the level of the window across the street.

Before he went further with his experiment he got into his room again and pulled with all his might at the clothes line.

This was to decide whether the wire above was strongly enough fastened to hold his weight. It proved to be firm.

When he was satisfied of this the detective made a slip noose in each end of the clothes line and thrust his arms in.

He then took the parcel that he had done up in the "down town shop" in his

hands and calmly stepped off the window ledge into the open air.

The wire immediately sagged under his weight and the clothes line slipped along it until Trim was directly over the middle of the street.

He was then from eighty to one hundred feet above the pavement and the slightest mishap would have caused him to fall to instant death.

When the clothes line had slipped down as far as the bottom curve of the sagging wire it stopped; it would slip down easy enough, but of course it would not slip up.

Trim had reckoned on this, however, and reaching up his hands he caught the two ends of rope and pulling himself up began to swing his body back and forth in the way that all athletes are familiar with.

He did this very gently because he feared that any sudden jerk might break the wire from its fastenings.

As he worked in this way his body swung further and further, and as New street is exceedingly narrow it was not long before he could touch his toes to the opposite building whenever he swung to that side.

He had calculated well; his feet just came to the bottom of the window ledge where the green curtain hung.

He allowed himself to swing up there twice before attempting to catch on, in order that he might see clearly what there was there to cling to.

There was nothing but the window frame, but the window ledge was wide and his fingers were strong and he believed that he could hang on; so the third time he gave himself a little extra swing and when his feet touched the ledge he threw himself forward and grasped the window frame.

For a moment the strain on his shoulders was so great that he nearly lost his balance.

Even if he had done so he would not have been alarmed for he would simply have swung back over the street again and would have been safe as long as the wire above him held.

He managed to cling on, however, and a moment later he had made his position more dangerous by unslinging one of his arms from the clothes line.

He still held that end in his hand, however, so as to swing back instantly if it should prove that he had to.

He was not surprised or particularly disappointed to find that this window, even though it was high in the air, was locked.

The detective was prepared for this also he took from his pocket a little tool similar to those used by glaziers.

It was merely a handle with a sharply pointed diamond in the end of it.

With this he began to cut away at the glass near the sash.

Although it was after midnight and nobody was stirring in that vicinity, he moistened the glass and did everything possible to prevent the diamond from making a scratching noise.

It was not entirely possible to prevent this and just as he had cut through a square of glass directly above the lock, he heard hurried footsteps within the room.

He realized then how perilous his situation was.

If the man inside should give his feet the slightest blow it would send him out over the street and he would be lucky indeed if his clothes line would hold on and prevent him from falling.

Moreover, if it should do that, the man in the room would have an easy target for revolver practice.

"I'm a goner," thought Trim, "if I don't get into this room before he reaches the window!"

He, therefore, gave the glass a sharp rap and the part that he had been cutting away fell inward.

Instantly he put his hand through the opening, turned the catch, pushed down the upper part of the window until he could seize the top, when he pulled it way down and vaulted inside.

Just as he did so somebody was seizing the curtain to raise it and Trim landed full in his arms but with the curtain between them.

The detective's fall staggered the unseen man, the curtain broke from its fastenings and both went down to the floor in a heap.

CHAPTER VII.

A RACE DOWN STAIRS.

If this had happened during business hours it is probable that every tenant in the big building would have been disturbed by the racket.

The green curtain being between Trim and his antagonist, prevented either man from getting a grip upon the other at first.

Trim was also bothered to some extent by the long clothes line which was still fastened to one shoulder.

He had tossed his parcel to the floor when he fell in so that that was no longer in his way, but for a moment or two there was a very confused struggle as each man in the darkness tried to push the curtain aside so as to use his hands to advantage.

As the man beneath the curtain was frightened nearly out of his senses he made a desperate attempt to break away from the detective altogether, and when at last he got free from the curtain he struck out wildly, fetching Trim a severe blow upon the temple, leaped to his feet and made a dash for the door.

The detective was after him instantly, although his brain reeled with the force of the man's blow.

Now that the curtain was down the room was dimly lighted from outside, but Trim did not need that to show him where the man was, for he could hear the clicking of metal and the bolts of the door were shot back.

Between himself and the door Trim could see an object dimly that he supposed was a long office table.

He was on his feet now, and to save time he placed his hands upon this table and vaulted across it.

His foot struck against something at one side that he had not been able to see, which not only broke the force of his leap, but tripped him so that he landed on his hands and knees upon the further side.

Just this instant's delay gave the other man his opportunity and while Trim was picking himself up he felt a little rush of air upon his face as the door was thrown open and slammed to again.

He heard retreating footsteps in the corridor and a moment later the sound of steps going down the long flight of stairs.

As the door opened readily from inside it was less than a second before Trim had passed through it to the hall.

He knew his way well enough in this building because of his long watch there the day before, but in order to make perfectly certain that he should lose no time in missing a stairway in the darkness, he took out his pocket lantern and drew the slide.

He was on the dead run to the stairway as he did this and just as the light flashed out he was passing one of the elevators.

A glance at it showed that through some carelessness the iron door had been left unlatched.

When an elevator door is fully closed it can not be opened from the outside, and every man who runs an elevator is supposed to see that each door he passes is firmly latched.

This one had been missed and it was now open a tiny crack. For Trim's purposes this was as good as if it were wide open.

Without the slightest hesitation he shut up his lantern, thrust it in his pocket and leaped to the door, which he pushed aside.

The elevator was at the bottom. Trim caught hold of the door post with one hand and steadied himself while he leaned far over the edge of the elevator well until he caught the wire cable that supported the machine.

This ran straight down from the pulleys on the roof to the elevator in the basement.

Having clutched the cable Trim let go with his hand and leaped out into the darkness.

If he had not been excited by the pursuit he might have been alarmed at the peril of the situation, but as it was, he thought only of getting to the bottom ahead of the fugitive; and as he said afterward he was doing what any athlete with a level head could do.

With both hands clutching the cable now, he held on for a moment while he wound his legs around it; then he let go with his hands and allowed himself to slide down the wire rope.

This is a trick that sailors learn and Trim knew that by pressing his legs close to the cable he could make himself descend rapidly or slowly at will or check his fall altogether.

As the cable was well oiled he not only descended easily but without the slightest noise.

Shortly after he had begun to whiz down in the darkness he heard the clatter of footsteps near him and knew that the fugitive was running along a floor to the next flight of stairs.

An instant later the sound of steps was above him.

Trim allowed himself to drop somewhat further and then put on brakes by pressing his knees against the cable and reached out one hand until he could feel the wall upon the corridor side of the well.

He touched bare wall at first, therefore he allowed himself to descend a few feet further, when he felt the iron grating that he knew to be a door.

It was then the work of but a second or two to lift the latch of the door and slide it open.

This done he clutched the door post hard, let go the cable and swung himself across to the floor of the corridor.

He did not know then what floor he was on, but it proved later that he was still one flight from the street.

Above him he could hear the approaching clatter of steps as the fugitive bounded down one flight after another.

Trim chuckled quietly and groped his way to the foot of the stairs where he leaned against the wall and waited.

A moment later the man came to the head of that flight and descended, clinging to the banister with one hand and coming down as rapidly as possible.

Just as he came to the bottom step Trim sprang forward, caught him in his arms and threw him heavily to the floor.

The man gave a loud gasp of astonishment and fright and then lay still, panting heavily.

Trim did not stop to handcuff him, but pulling up the clothes line which was still attached to his shoulder, wound it around and around the man's body, thus binding his arms to his side.

Trim then caught an end in the rope, lifted the man to his feet and ordered him to march up the stairs.

"Lord help me!" groaned the man, "but I can't stir. I'm all of a shake. Who are you and what are you, and what are you going to do? Don't for heaven's sake drop me out of the window! How many are there of you?"

"I'll tell you all about that a little later," Trim answered. "Get up now! you can walk as well as I can."

The man leaned against the banister blowing like a porpoise and gasped that he could not stir.

Trim caught hold of the rope at his back and fairly yanked him up the first flight.

This action seemed to bring the man somewhat to his senses for the rest of the way he went without assistance.

It was a long climb up, and it seemed to Trim as if they would never get there, for he was anxious to land his man once more within the office, fearing the janitor of the building might sleep in it and be aroused by the disturbance.

The detective did not want to be interrupted by anybody just then.

It happened that the janitor who ought to have slept in the building had taken a night off so that Trim and his captive were the only men there.

When they came to the office Trim fastened the door securely and made his prisoner sit down on the floor in a corner; then he took out his pocket lamp again and lit up the place.

He first directed the rays at the man himself who sat with open mouth staring at him.

Trim had not seen the man before. A glance satisfied him of this and of the fact that the man could not possibly break away, then he turned the lantern in another direction and as he did so the rays fell for a moment upon his own face.

"Ah!" exclaimed the prisoner, "I might have known."

"Known what?" asked Trim.

"Who you are."

"Who did you think I was?"

"Well," answered the man with a long breath, "when you came in through that eighth story window I was certain that you must be the devil himself."

Trim chuckled but made no response.

"That was what scared me more than anything else," the man continued, "but I'm not sure that I wouldn't rather fight with the old Nick, that with Nick Carter or any of his men."

Still Trim said nothing. He was greatly interested in examining the room which he had been so anxious to see.

"I believe you Carters must be in league with demons," the prisoner continued, "for I can't understand how else you could have flown into this room or got down stairs ahead of me.

"I don't know what you intend to do with me, but I can tell you right now that I give up completely.

"If there's anything that I can say or do to make you let me off easy, just let me know for I'll do it."

"I'll attend to you in a minute or so," said Trim, at last.

The detective was studying a machine that took up nearly half the room.

It was a portion of it that he had supposed to be a table in the darkness and in leaping across it had caught his foot in another part of the machine.

It looked almost exactly like the model of the gold separator that was set up in Drummond & Company's office.

The only difference was that it had a crank wheel and a short section of belting.

Trim took hold of the wheel and gave it a turn, immediately there was a grinding noise.

"Old Hatgood was right," said the detective to himself, "his story was perfectly straight but when he was taken into this building from the New Street side his head got turned and he didn't notice that he went into a room on the other side of the corridor from the one that he had been in before.

"In every respect this room seems to be an exact duplicate of Drummond & Company's main office.

"I'm not very much surprised at it and I think I see through the whole scheme now, but I'll just find out what this man will tell me about it."

Trim set his lamp upon the edge of the machine where its rays would fall directly upon the prisoner's face.

"Now, then," said the detective, "I've learned all about the Denver Milling Company.

"Whether I let you off easy or not depends upon your telling me the whole truth without my asking you any questions.

"If I catch you trying to deceive me it'll be the worse for you, understand?"

"I'm ready to give the whole thing away," the prisoner replied earnestly, "and I'll tell you where you can find the others if you want to arrest them before morning."

"Go ahead," Trim responded, although he had no intention of arresting the men until he could catch them at work.

"What shall I tell you first?" asked the prisoner.

"Your name," answered Trim. "Is it Howard?"

"No," the man responded, "you're wrong there; my name is Holt and so help me, I've had almost nothing to do with the operations of Howard and Maynard.

"What are you here for then?" the detective demanded, sternly.

"I'm in charge of the office."

CHAPTER VIII.

AN ELECTRIC DOSE.

"Yes, I see you are, but that must mean that you've got a hand in the operations?"

The man shook his head.

"They do all the crooked work," he said. "My business is simply to stay here night and day to guard the thing from surprise at night and in the day time to steer people away."

"I never brought anybody in here to be robbed. They don't even divide with me but they pay me a regular salary.

"Sometimes, you see, jays that have been swindled find their way back here, and when they do I'm the one who meets them.

"They've never seen me before and I tell them simply that I'm the man in charge of the office, but that I don't know anything about the business arrangements, so you see they don't get any satisfaction out of me, and after a time they usually give it up and go away."

"Don't they ever make inquiries at

Drummond & Company's office?" asked Trim.

"Yes; but what if they do? Drummond & Company don't know the first thing about this.

"I believe they suspected some time ago that Howard was crooked for they discharged him, but they didn't know just what he was up to."

"Well, go on," Trim said, "tell me all about how the game was worked.

"I know enough already, you understand, but I want to see if I can use you for state's evidence. If I can you know that that means your feedom."

"I'll tell you everything," Holt answered, earnestly.

"Maynard has been a swindler all his life. Howard, so far as I know never had any hand in crooked work until he took a hold of this.

"He saw his opportunity through the fact that so many farmers wrote to Drummond & Company to ask about the gold separator.

"He thought he saw a way to make a lot of money out of it and as he knew Maynard he asked his advice.

"Maynard saw that the idea was a perfect bonanza and they worked it out together.

"The first thing they did was to hire this office and fit it up, as you see, exactly like Drummond & Company's office.

"They gave out that they represented the Denver Milling Company and that in time they intended to do a lot of business here.

"By paying their rent a year in advance they avoided troublesome questions.

"When everything was ready Howard stole a lot of Drummond & Company's letter heads and had typewritten circulars prepared which were sent to farmers at a distance.

"As Maynard had been in the green goods business at one time he knew the names and addresses of a lot of farmers which made that part of the business easy.

"These letters appeared to come from Drummond & Company, and each letter suggested that the farmer should bring in samples of the rock about his place to be tested by the gold separator.

"The next step was taken by Howard, who told Mr. Drummond that farmers were calling all the time with samples and that it was a pity that such men would have to be turned away without satisfaction.

"'It'll save us annoyance,' says Howard to Drummond, 'if I could take these men out when they come in, give them a cheap luncheon somewhere and tell them kindly just how hopeless it is for them to think of a gold separator.

"'Then they will go home feeling better and we won't hear from them again.'

"Drummond thought this was a good plan and so told Howard to go ahead.

"Drummond, you see, is a decent sort of man and he would have done a good deal to avoid being bothered by cranks who thought they had gold mines on their property.

"It easily got to be the habit in Drummond & Company's office for Howard to meet the jays that came there and take them out of the building.

"Then he would jolly them up and bring them back by the New street entrance and hurry them into this office.

"They wouldn't notice but what they had gone into Drummond & Company's office and the rest of it was easy enough.

"They would pretend to grind the jay's samples and show him a few dollars' worth of gold dust which they said was the result of the process.

"In most every case they managed to sell a worthless contrivance that they called a machine, for a high price."

"They must have made a lot of money," said Trim.

"Loads of it!" said Holt.

"And it has made them bold," continued Trim, "for so far as I can see they haven't tried to get away from town, although they knew that I was getting on to them."

"That's just it!" Holt replied. "They've made so much money and there's so much more in sight from farmers that they've been jollying up by letters, that they'll risk a good deal to hang on for a few weeks longer.

"Maynard thought he had done you up but it seems he was mistaken."

"So it was he who typed up that sign, was it?"

"Yes, he had spoiled your movements

and knew that some time or other you would be sure to pass that way, so he hired the room over the laundry, cut the sign pole almost in two and held it in place with a string.

"He was on the watch for you when you walked under it and so could let the thing drop just as he wanted."

"How did they manage," Trim asked, "now that Howard has been discharged by Drummond & Company?"

"They hang around in Broad Street," Holt answered, "on the lookout for strangers.

"Maynard has had so much experience in tackling jays that it doesn't come very hard for him to find out whether any man with a gripsack in his hand is looking for Drummond & Company's office; then he steers them into this office——"

"But how about the letters that the farmers write to Drummond & Company? What does Drummond think when he reads them?"

"He don't read 'em. They used to be opened by Howard, you see, and now they are picked out of the mail by Drummond's office boy."

"So he's in it, eh?"

"Only as Howard pays him a little to look out for the mail. Howard gives him a list of towns to which circulars have been sent. When the boy sees a letter postmarked according to that list, he hands it to Howard. The boy doesn't know anything about this office. Maynard spots the jays, as I said, brings 'em here——"

"And the rest of it goes on as before," added Trim.

"Yes, that's about it."

"Will they be on the lookout for victims to-morrow?"

"Yes. They've got arrangements made for a big haul. I know they are planning to buy quite a lot of gold dust and that when they've worked out these deals successfully they mean to drop the scheme for a time at least for fear you may tumble to them."

"All right, then, I'll take a hand in their game and see if I can't rake in the stakes myself.

"Meantime I'll give you another sleeping room for the rest of the night."

"Are you going to lock me up?"

"You bet I am."

"I thought you'd let me go free?"

"The judge of the criminal court may do that after he's heard your evidence."

Holt knew perfectly well that it was useless to argue with the detective and so he remained silent, watching Trim curiously while the latter made an examination of the fake machine and did something to it with the articles that he had brought in his parcel.

Holt could not understand what was going on and Trim of course did not explain.

It took some time for the detective to complete his arrangements and when he had done so he led his prisoner to the Old Slip Station.

There he got the address of a glazier who lived not far away and before sunrise Trim had him at work in the secret office fitting a new pane of glass into the window that had been partly cut away.

This work was completed before the arrival of anybody at the Broad street building, and when Trim left the place it looked just as usual.

"Maynard and Howard will wonder where the man in charge of the office is," said Trim to himself, "but if they have really got a big scheme on hand that won't scare them away.

"I must catch them at work, because even Holt's evidence won't be strong enough to make certain of convicting them."

Trim had asked some further questions of Holt in the police station, and had learned that among the victims who were expected to arrive on that day was a farmer named Horton from a backwoods town in Pennsylvania.

The detective found an old grip sack in "the down town shop" and took it with him across the ferry to Jersey City.

There he went into a hotel and disguised himself as a countryman.

This done he loitered about the Pennsylvania Railroad Station until a through train came in, when he joined the passengers and went out onto the ferry boat.

He was hoping to meet Maynard there or on the New York side of the ferry, but in this he was disappointed.

When he arrived at New York side he went straight to Broad Street, entered the

building where Drummond & Company's offices were and began to look over the signs that covered one side of the wall.

As he stood there he saw Maynard and another man conversing a little way down the corridor.

They looked at him doubtfully and seemed to hesitate whether to approach him or not.

"They've found," thought Trim, "that the man in charge of the office isn't on deck and they're scared.

"I don't wonder they're suspicious, but I'll bet that they are too greedy to let a chance go by.

"However, if they won't tackle me I'll have to tackle them."

A moment later, therefore, Trim went on into the building and halted almost in front of Maynard and the other man, looking curiously at the rapidly-moving elevators.

Suddenly he turned to the two and asked:

"Say! mister, will one of them big buckets take a man up to Mr. Drummond's office?"

"Certainly," said Maynard, quickly, "we're just going there ourselves and will show you where it is if you like?"

"Thankee!" responded Trim.

He saw with satisfaction that his disguise and manner had completely deceived the swindlers.

They had been suspicious of him until he spoke, now they were quite certain that he was one of their victims.

Maynard chatted with him pleasantly on the way up, but made no mention of gold separators.

As they went through the corridor on the eighth floor both men walked in such a way that Trim, if he had been a stranger, would not have been likely to see Drummond & Company's sign on the door of room 809.

They took him to room 815, opened it and invited him to enter.

"Is this here the place?" asked Trim.

"Yes," replied Maynard, "and we are members of the firm; we thought we wouldn't say anything about it while others were standing around, for everybody likes to keep his business to himself, you know, but we were just on the way up to our office.

"You have come early, Mr.——"

"Horton's my name, mister," said Trim.

"Ah! you're from Pennsylvania, I believe?"

"I be."

"Have you got the samples that we asked you to bring?"

"Got 'bout a peck an' a half of 'em," Trim answered, setting his gripsack on a chair and staring hard at the fake machine.

"Very well, then, we'll test them at once. Just open your bag and let us take a look at the stuff."

Of course Trim had provided himself with a small quantity of broken stone and he promptly opened the bag.

Maynard and the other, who proved later to be Howard, pretended to examine the stones with great interest.

"They look very promising," said Howard, "but of course we can never tell until we've tried them on the separator.

"We may as well do so without delay."

Saying this Howard took the stones and dropped them into an opening at one end of the machine.

When this was done, Maynard took hold of the crank wheel and tried to turn it.

He jumped about a foot into the air, cried "ouch!" and then stood there trembling and staring, his hands still upon the wheel.

"Sutthin' bit yeou?" asked Trim, innocently.

"Ugh! I should think there had!" groaned Maynard, as the perspiration began to roll down his face.

"What's the matter?" asked Howard, nervously.

"Maybe one of those stones has got caught in the geering!" gasped Maynard, hardly able to speak.

"I don't know, something's wrong; I can't let go of the confounded thing!"

"What!" cried Howard, stepping forward and laying his hands, too, upon the wheel.

"Can't let go? Ouch! Thunder and Mars!"

He too jumped into the air and then stood squirming and wriggling with his hands hard gripped upon the wheel.

Trim sat down in a chair and laughed.

The two glared angrily at him and looked fearfully at each other, trying all the time to break away from the machine, but not being able to stir.

Meantime they were shaking so that the floor almost trembled beneath them.

"Now, gentlemen," said Trim in his natural voice, "you can dance there just as long as you want to, it depends entirely on you."

"Who the mischief are you?" chattered Maynard.

"I reckon you can guess."

"It's Carter!" stammered Howard.

Trim nodded.

"Right the first time trying," he said.

"Now, then, I'm going to make an exhibition of you in two or three minutes, but I'll make you a bargain first.

"I don't need to tell you that I've got you where you can't stir.

"There's an electric machine in the corner here that I put in last night and that will hold you as long as the battery doesn't give out, and according to my calculation the battery will stand it for about one week."

Both men groaned.

"However," continued Trim, "if by any chance the battery should go wrong and you should break away, I've got an argument right here that I don't believe either of you care to listen to."

With this he drew a revolver and placed it across his knees.

"For heaven's sake!" cried Maynard, "shut off the confounded thing, won't you?"

"You don't need to make the current so stiff!" exclaimed Howard.

"It'll do you good!" retorted Trim, indifferently. "You fellows have swindled a good many innocent farmers and you're in for swindling more.

"You haven't had time to blow in anything like all the money you've made from them, and I'm particularly interested in one of your victims.

"A man named Hatgood of East Berlin, Vermont."

The swindlers glanced at each other and scowled.

"You did him for $2,000, I believe," Trim went on, "and you've got to make him whole.

"What will happen after you've done that the courts will decide."

"I'll give up $2,000 for a chance to get away from this thing!" grumbled Maynard.

"Where's the money?"

"There's a wad of bills in my coat."

Before beginning his work Maynard had taken off his coat and thrown it upon a chair.

Trim immediately went to the coat found a roll of bills and calmly counted out $2,000, which he laid in a separate pile upon the desk.

The other bills he left upon the coat.

"You can dance there for a minute or so," he remarked and left the office.

He went at once to Drummond & Company's office, where he found Drummond opening his mail.

Without giving that gentleman any time to ask questions, Trim caught him by the arm and saying simply, that there was something of great importance for him to see, dragged him through the corridor to room 815.

Drummond was overcome with astonishment when he saw a duplicate of his own office and his former clerk and a stranger clinging and trembling at a fake machine.

"I just wanted you to see this, Mr. Drummond," said Trim, "so that you could understand why it is that you have been bothered so much with farmers with impossible gold mines, and also that you might testify in court as to the method these men pursued in conducting their swindling operations.

"This money here they are returning to me to be given to one of the men whom they have swindled.

"The rest of the money I shall leave where it is to be used as the court directs.

"Do you understand?"

"Partly," said Drummond. "Who are you?"

"My name is Trimble Carter——"

"Oh! the detective; then I understand it all!"

Trim thereupon turned off the current at the same time leveling his revolver at the swindlers.

They staggered away from the machine wringing their hands and so weak from

the big dose of electricity they had received that they could hardly stand upright.

Trim gave Drummond two pairs of hand cuffs and while the detective covered the swindlers, Drummond proceeded to put the bracelets upon them.

After that it was a short matter to take the swindlers to the station house.

In due time they were tried in court and convicted and sentenced to long terms at Sing Sing.

They had made money by their operations so rapidly that a good many of those whom they had swindled were able to recover most that they had lost.

Old Hatgood went back to Vermont feeling happy, but declaring that nothing would ever tempt him to go to New York again, "not if there was a million in it, b'gosh!"

[THE END.]

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